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White House denies report it attempted to kill Qaddafi

FROM COMBINED DISPATCHES

U.S. bombing raids on Libya last year were not planned to assassinate Muammar Qaddafi, a White House spokesman said yesterday, but "if he had been killed, there probably wouldn't have been a damp eye in the place."

The White House, responding to a report in The New York Times Sunday magazine that the raids were intended to kill the Libyan leader and his family, said "there was no plan to kill Qaddafi per se."

"What we said at the time of the bombing was and is correct — the bombs that fell on Qaddafi's compound were targeted on a military barracks 200 meters away," said spokesman Dan Howard.

"If he had been killed, there probably wouldn't have been a damp eye in the place, but there was no plan to kill Qaddafi per se."

Reporter Seymour Hersh, quoting unidentified sources, said in the Times magazine article the White House ordered the assassination of Col. Qaddafi after the CIA tried for five years to oust the Libyan leader.

The April 14, 1986, raids on Tripoli and the port city of Sidi Bilal left Col. Qaddafi's 15-month-old adopted daughter dead and his wife and eight other children hospitalized, but the leader himself was not reported injured.

According to the article, planning for the Libyan attack involved many of the same people who were sending arms to Iran, including Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter and Lt. Col. Oliver North.

Mr. Hersh quotes unidentified sources as saying Israeli intelligence had pinpointed Col. Qaddafi's location, but laser guidance systems on four of nine F-111s failed and the bombs missed.

Responding to earlier stories that the Reagan administration had hoped to kill Col. Qaddafi, administration officials have denied vehemently Col. Qaddafi's personal quar-

ters were targeted.

One administration official, asking not to be identified, said people involved in target planning said the bombs that hit Col. Qaddafi's compound "were actually aimed at the barracks of his personal guard."

The official said it may be true that lasers failed, but the bombs "were never aimed at his personal compound."

Mr. Hersh reported William J. Casey, who resigned earlier this month as CIA director after being incapacitated by cancer of the brain, was the source of claims Col. Qaddafi had sent out "hit teams" targeting President Reagan and other high-ranking officials. The article said some colleagues believe he fabricated those reports.

Last month Iranian emigre sources told the Associated Press that Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iranian arms dealer, was the source of the "hit team" reports, and the CIA did not trust him because those reports were discredited. Mr. Ghorbanifar was a middle man in U.S. arms sales to Iran.

[Former Libyan officials had been murdered on Col. Qaddafi's orders in Europe and the United States, but Mr. Hersh noted that he was not known to have acted on his many threats against Western political leaders.]

[On Nov. 12, 1984, former Libyan Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Bak-koush was photographed in a pool of blood in Egypt, and Col. Qaddafi's spokesmen after seeing the published photographs claimed credit for "executing" him. But Egypt had captured the four would-be assassins hired by Libya. Egypt had faked the photo and Mr. Bak-koush was not hurt, it was revealed after Libya had been trapped into boasting of his murder.]

According to Mr. Hersh, the bombing orders supplied by the White House to the Pentagon did not list Col. Qaddafi's tent or family

home as targets, but one unidentified officer said the planes carried photographs indicating where he was and where his family was.

"There's no question they were looking for Qaddafi," said an Air Force intelligence officer. "It was briefed that way. They were going to kill him."

Other unidentified sources said his family had been sought out because their deaths would lead to a loss of face for Col. Qaddafi when he could not defend his own family.

In advance of the bombings, according to one White House official, State Department lawyers began to prepare a legal paper that argued that "in the context of military action what normally would be considered murder is not."

Mr. Reagan's involvement in targeting the Libyan leader, the article said, was not clear. He was a strong supporter of covert action, but resisted the idea of bombing Libya at first.

Mr. Hersh said Col. North told colleagues he proposed a series of other measures, including the use of the Stealth bomber, the launching of a conventionally armed Tomahawk cruise missile by a submarine, and a landing by a Navy SEAL team which would use a laser to direct bombs to Col. Qaddafi.

Mr. Hersh said Col. North advanced those proposals at a meeting attended by Mr. Reagan, Adm. William J. Crowe Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and others. Adm. Crowe through an aide told the magazine he recalled North as only a "back-bench note taker" at White House meetings.

All the proposals were rejected, the article said.

Mr. Hersh said when Mr. Reagan announced the bombings, additional paragraphs were prepared for his speech in case Col. Qaddafi's death was confirmed. Those paragraphs said the death was not retaliation or a crime, but an effort to prevent future terrorist attacks, the article said.